This is a common scene in many parts of the world. Have you got the chops to dock a boat bow or stern to a wharf?

Seamanship

By Tor Pinney

Med Mooring Secrets Revealed

It's not as hard as it looks. Just think ahead and take it slow

Mediterranean mooring—docking a boat end-on to a quay, as opposed to tying up alongside—is a common practice in many parts of the world, especially in non-tidal waters. Any skipper setting sail for foreign ports will find docking this way is often mandatory, as it saves dock space and protects boats from wake damage. Unfortunately, many American sailors have little idea how to correctly dock stern-to or bow-to and are apt to embarrass themselves when cruising abroad. All it takes, though, is a little forethought and practice.

Whether you moor stern-to or bow-to is often a matter of preference, although boat design, protruding equipment (davits, bowsprits and the like) and water depth can be determining factors. For example, boats with bowsprits or high pulpits are easier to board from astern; a boat with a windvane or davits aft is often safer moored bow-to. If the water is shallow close to shore, you may need to be bow-to to protect your rudder. In any case, the basic procedure is the same.

Preparation

First check out your landing site with binoculars and select a space with convenient features for securing lines. Also check for underwater obstructions close to the dock to determine if a bow-to landing is required. Try to gauge the water depth where you intend to drop your anchor in order to estimate how much scope you'll need. As always, more is better. It's especially important the anchor doesn't drag when your hull is close to shore.

Make the anchor ready to deploy and be sure the rode won't snag running out. Be certain, too, that you have enough rode for the boat to reach the dock—especially if setting a stern anchor—and make fast the bitter end. If you suspect the bottom is foul, attach a buoyed trip line to the anchor.

Hang fenders on both sides. Even if you're not coming alongside another boat, you should leave these down to cushion new arrivals. Also hang a fender over the stern to protect your transom, or over the bow if going in bow-to.

Make fast two long docklines to cleats port and starboard at the landward end of your vessel, neatly coiled and ready to use. These should be led so they can be passed to the dock clear of pulpits and stanchions. If the shore fittings call for it, put loops in the ends ahead of time.

Bringing her in

To dock stern-to in normal conditions, round up to where you want to release your anchor with your boat's stern facing the dock. Observe the angle of anchor rodes running from boats already docked and maneuver to drop yours clear of and parallel to them. Reverse the engine. When the boat's forward motion stops, or just as she begins to make sternway, let the anchor go. Keep light tension on the rode as it pays out.

Fin-keeled boats with spade rudders are easier to steer in reverse than are full-keeled boats. Most vessels pull, or "walk," to port or starboard in reverse, especially before they start making enough way for the rudder to affect steerage. Know which way your boat goes and steer to compensate. If the bow begins to fall off to leeward, signal the anchor handler to put a little more tension on the rode. If the whole boat slips sideways, try correcting by using short, strong bursts of forward power with the helm aimed first to windward, then to leeward, to straighten it out. Experience is the only way to improve these boat-handling skills.

As the boat nears the dock, the anchor handler should take tight control of the rode by passing it around a cleat, so that he can brake the boat if necessary. Make sure the anchor has set well by intentionally braking the

In many places you'll find Med moor lines set on buoys and won't have to drop an anchor

Photo by **Gary John Norman/Bluegreen Pictures** (top); by **Dick Dixon** (bottom);

boat with the anchor rode. When the boat is close enough, have your most agile crewmember step ashore with the windward stern line first. Once this is made fast to a dock fitting and the slack taken up, the second line can be tossed and secured.

If the dock lines are long enough, pass them once around the shore fitting and back to the boat, so that both ends can be secured on board. This makes leaving easier, because no one will have to go ashore to cast off. Set the dock lines at a wide angle to prevent the boat's stern from shifting and to allow for tide. This may be more easily accomplished by crossing the lines. Always set the lines so they can be adjusted from on board.

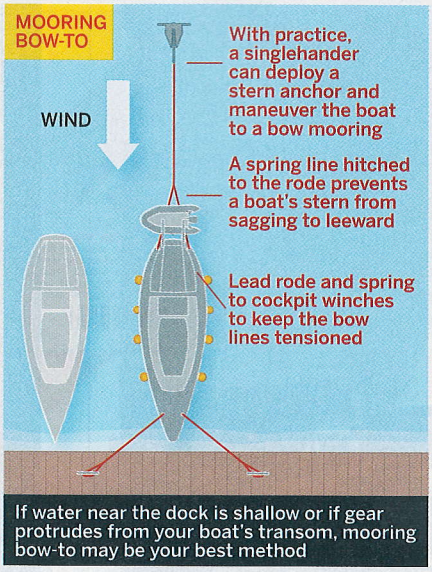
The procedure for docking bow-to is much the same, but has several advantages. For one thing, it's always easier to steer forward into a slip than it is to go in backwards. For another, once docked you will enjoy more privacy in your cockpit and cabin. It's also much easier for a short-handed crew or singlehanded skipper to control a stern anchor rode while steering than it is to control an anchor in the bow.

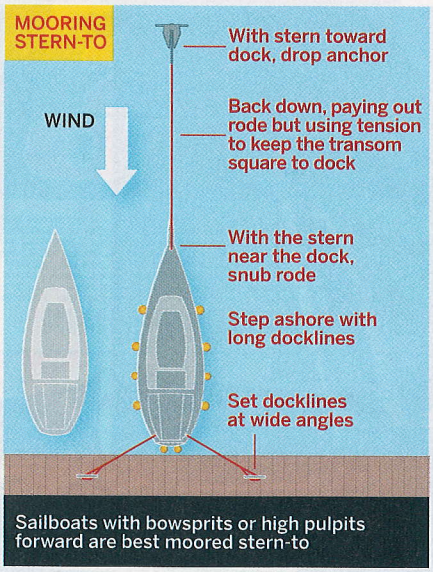
Once the bow is close to the dock, a singlehander can make fast the stern rode, leave the engine idling forward, and walk to the bow to handle dock lines. In a crosswind, the helm can be pitched to windward to hold the boat up while the skipper goes forward. With a little practice this technique is very effective.

Coming in bow-to does require a good stern anchor, which should be carried in such a way that it can be easily deployed, preferably via a stern-mounted anchor roller. Ideally, the rode should be stored in a proper chain-locker aft, although a deck box or a sturdy bucket can work just as well.

A stern anchor is normally led from one quarter of the vessel or the other, which means the boat will sag to leeward when the rode is to windward. To correct this, run a spring line aft from the opposite stern quarter cleat and secure it to the anchor rode with a rolling hitch about 10 feet back from the transom. The spring line then forms a bridle that allows you to adjust the angle of pull on the anchor. Run both the stern rode and spring line to winches, and you'll have the muscle you need to adjust and tighten things up in a blow.

As with any docking maneuver, the key to Med mooring, whether bow- or stern-to, is to do it slowly and maintain control. If there is a strong crosswind or current, warping your boat in may be the most prudent approach. Set your anchor first and run lines ashore by dinghy. You can then crank the boat into the dock with winches or a windlass without the risk of losing control.


MOORING BOW-TO
WIND
With practice, a singlehander can deploy a stern anchor and maneuver the boat to a bow mooring
A spring line hitched to the rode prevents a boat's stern from sagging to leeward
Lead rode and spring to cockpit winches to keep the bow lines tensioned
If water near the dock is shallow or if gear protrudes from your boat's transom, mooring bow-to may be your best method


MOORING STERN-TO
WIND
With stern toward dock, drop anchor
Back down, paying out rode but using tension to keep the transom square to dock
With the stern near the dock, snub rode
Step ashore with long docklines
Set docklines at wide angles
Sailboats with bowsprits or high pulpits forward are best moored stern-to

Protecting your lines

If you're staying put for a long time, it's a good idea to put a length of chain on the shore fittings to save chafing your lines. Eye-splice a metal thimble into one end of a 6-foot length of line. Through this thimble pass a length of galvanized chain. Use a shackle or a caribiner clip to make the chain into a loop to secure your boat to the dock fittings. Tie the rope tail to your regular dock line with a sheet bend (not a square knot), and take up the dock line aboard. The chain will absorb most of the abrasion, and if the tail ever chafes, it can be replaced with another short length of line.

If your anchor rode is rope, you may also want to protect it from being cut by passing boats. One solution is to hang a heavy weight, or "sentinel," from the rode on a shackle. This can be controlled from deck with a light line led to the shackle. The sentinel will hold the rode deeper under the water, away from spinning props, while increasing the anchor's holding power. It will also help absorb any shock loads on the rode. *AL*

TO STEP ASHORE

Once docked, many sailors employ a boarding ramp, or passarelle, for getting ashore. This can be as simple as a broad wood plank, or as fancy as a cruise ship's gangway. Whatever you use should be strong with a non-skid surface.

The ramp can be simply lashed to the boat, but ideally it should be secured by a single central male pintle on a hinged crossbar mounted under the ramp's inboard end. The pintle slips into a female gudgeon at the top of the transom. This allows the ramp to be easily adjusted both horizontally and vertically. For maximum control and security, guy lines can be led from each dockside corner of the ramp to the corresponding stern quarter cleats. A halyard shackled to a long bridle or yoke with a spreader at its apex about 8 feet above the ramp can be used to control its height and keep it off the dock if desired. Ideally the ramp should have wheels or rollers at the dock end to keep it from dragging and scraping when there's a surge or wake. Stanchions with lifelines will make "walking the plank" even safer.

Beware! A strong offshore breeze can sometimes flip a passarelle back onto a boat. Hanging a weight from it, just off the dock, prevents this from happening. A bucket of water will do the trick.

Tor Pinney has logged 150,000 miles under sail and is the author of *Ready for Sea: How to Outfit the Modern Cruising Sailboat*. Visit him at www.tor.cc

Illustrations by ***Andy Steer***